



# United States and Mongolia Conduct *Exercise Gobi Wolf*

BY COLONEL (RETIRED) ARTHUR L. BRADSHAW, JR.

## United States-Mongolian Relations

Cooperation between the United States and Mongolia has developed dynamically since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1987. Today Mongolia and the United States share a growing and strong cooperative partnership based on shared values, a commitment to democracy and free-market economy, and the global war against terrorism. To that end the two nations are partnering in several areas to expand expertise and training to Mongolia as it reconfigures its government from a Soviet-style bureaucracy to a more western, interagency-based structure.

Longstanding challenges that historically and traditionally face Mongolia include many types of natural and manmade disasters. A coordinated and integrated interagency planning and response system is recognized as critical to the improvement of national disaster planning, preparedness, and response. The Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA) of United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), along with the State of Alaska and the Alaskan National Guard are working closely with the Mongolian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to accomplish this.

## Mongolia

Mongolia, a landlocked nation on a plateau between Russian Siberia and the plains of northern China, is roughly the size of the state of Alaska. It is a country rich in history that includes the Mongolian Empire of Chinggis Khan (Genghis Khan) that stretched from China to the Caspian Sea. Following the fall of the empire, Mongolia was under the Manchu Dynasty for several centuries. The Mongol Monarchy was established in 1911 but was replaced in 1921 by nationalist revolutionaries who drove out Chinese and Tsarist forces, installing a Mongolian “people’s government” in its place. Mongolia remained a member of the socialist eastern bloc until the elections of 1990 when it began its transition to present-day democracy.



## Mongolian Natural and Potential Manmade Disasters

Mongolia’s geographic position on the high plateau of Central Asia subjects it to severe climatic conditions. Differences in daily temperatures are extreme during both the warm and cold seasons. World climate changes are increasing normal droughts and zuds. Zuds are extremely snowy winters during which livestock is unable to find fodder through the snow cover. This causes large numbers of animals, vital to the well-being of the inhabitants of the

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vast Mongolian countryside, to be lost to starvation and cold. Zuds are increasing in frequency from once every three years to occurring in consecutive years. Other forms of natural disasters include forest and grass fires, heavy rains and snowfall, river flooding, sand storms, dust storms, and blizzards. Annual fires are of particular concern.

Potential manmade disasters include the dangers from toxic chemicals. More than 1000 chemicals, over 3000 medicaments, and over 100 pesticides are imported into and transported within the country.

Mongolia also possesses large mineral deposits. Nearly 15% of the world's fluorspar is mined in Mongolia. It is a major producer and exporter of copper, molybdenum, and uranium. Extensive coal mining provides the means for heat and electricity throughout the country. Other mining operations include the extraction of tungsten, phosphates, tin, nickel, zinc, gold, silver, and iron. These operations represent the potential for mining disasters, especially with an older, underdeveloped infrastructure.

## The Disaster Response Training Program

At the request of the United States Ambassador to Mongolia, Mark C. Minton, the United States Department of Defense initiated a bilateral, progressive, multi-phased, joint disaster response training program with the Mongolian government, a program that spanned several months starting in early 2009. The program has produced one of the most successful cooperative exchanges and disaster management training activities between the United States and Mongolia to date. The intent of the training project was to exercise NEMA, and the results have far exceeded expectations.

The overall training program started with Initial Incident Command System (ICS) training being provided to NEMA's senior and intermediate staffs, as well as city, regional, and federal level agencies involved in disaster management. The ICS training was planned and coordinated under the lead of USPACOM's COE-DMHA. It was supported by subject matter experts (SMEs) from the State of Alaska and the Alaska National Guard, and the U.S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership (USAWC-CSL), all working together under COE-DMHA. The Mongolians enthusiastically received all levels of the training and started work immediately to put this expertise and experience to work, improving upon initial draft efforts and adapting them to Mongolian situations as part of an impressive, well coordinated, interagency planning effort.

NEMA then used these efforts to lead the development of a nationally coordinated Incident Management Plan. This two week phase was jointly coordinated between NEMA and COE-DMHA, and supported by SMEs from Alaska and CSL, USAWC. The first half was a week-long, senior-level tabletop exercise. The exercise opened with remarks by Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister M. Enkhbold, Ambassador Minton, Lt. Gen. (Ret) John F. Goodman, COE-DMHA, and Major General Patrick D. Wilson, Deputy Commanding General, United States Army Pacific. In the initial phase the senior-level executive staff focused on interagency processes and responsibilities. Their products were handed off to mid-level staff planners who then received a scenario of a train derailment which involved hazardous materials. The planners broke into four separate workgroups. Each group developed its own Incident Response Plan that identified the responsibilities of each of the agencies. This culminated with a full briefing of the results by each group to senior level staff members that laid out agency responsibilities.

This particular phase served several tangible benefits. First, exercise participants developed an "action matrix" that will be a basic "Battle Drill" in future crises. Next, their products will serve as a template for future response plans. Lastly, these items will be used to refine Standard Operating Procedures for Disaster Management and Emergency Response Planning.





## Exercise Gobi Wolf

The final phase was the program's capstone event, *Exercise Gobi Wolf*. It was conducted from 30 March to 10 April 2009, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, under the auspices of the Mongolian NEMA and USPACOM's COE-DMHA. It was supported by CSL, USAWC, the State of Alaska, the Alaska Railroad and the Alaska National Guard. Other partners included the Asia Foundation, the Institute for Strategic Studies, Ulaanbaatar Railway (the Mongolian-Russian Joint National Railroad), and the Mongolia Department of Transportation. Of particular note was the successful partnership that Alaska and Mongolia have developed over the past six years under the National Guard's State Partnership Program. This partnership has grown into a close and trusting relationship. The exercise objectives were to:



1. Provide Incident Command System (ICS) training to both senior and intermediate staffs of the Mongolian NEMA, and to the other Mongolian agencies involved in disaster management.
2. Assist NEMA in the development of a National Incident Management Plan for a railroad disaster and to refine interagency Standard Operating Procedures for disaster management and emergency response planning and operations through a field training exercise (FTX).

This on-the-ground scenario depicted a train derailment involving hazardous materials on a major railway artery within the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Over three hundred first responders and participants were involved. They included governmental and railway first responders, unique service and medical agencies, senior and intermediate staffs of over twelve different Mongolian departments, agencies, and organizations, private and industry participants from the railway sector, ministerial-level leaders, and the Mongolian news media. The exercise successfully demonstrated all levels of planning and training up to this phase, and particularly highlighted the extensive work that NEMA and the Mongolian interagency did to develop and expand the draft plans from the initial working groups into a comprehensive, coordinated response plan for the derailment scenario.



An ancillary benefit of the training and the *Gobi Wolf* exercise was the extensive networking that occurred between governmental participants that the Mongolian staff members experienced. Few of the staffers from the numerous agencies had worked with the others before. Many of the departments and organizations were historically intense rivals that had competed under the former Soviet system. This was a system where knowledge is power, and power represents money and influence in a monetarily constrained, bureaucratic environment. At the end of the training sessions and tabletop exercise, tasks that seemed almost impossible before were accomplished smoothly and efficiently. It was through networking that people realized that they could work together in support of a common, mutually beneficial goal.

## Reception of the Event by United States, Mongolian Officials and the Public

All of the Mongolian participants and their agencies gave a total professional effort to all aspects of the program, from the ICS training to the tabletop exercises to the FTX. Their pace of learning and expansion of their knowledge to make it their own exceeded expectations. The actual conduct of the *Exercise Gobi Wolf* disaster response exercise was most impressive and demonstrated exceptional expertise by all agencies with the resources that were available. By all accounts the exercise received very favorable television and newspaper reports from the national media and multiple news sources in Ulaanbaatar.

## The Way Ahead

The United States and Mongolia should capitalize on the success of the ICS training and final exercise. However, this should be considered a journey and not just a destination. This could be the first in a long series of annual exercises that grows the capacity of the Mongolian government to react successfully to crisis action planning and execution. A series of exercises such as this would make it easier to further enhance the capacity of the Mongolian government and disaster response agencies at the local, regional, and federal level. A key to this success will be a wider understanding of the concept of command management by all agencies and organizations across all levels of government.

Further, future exercises should incorporate emergency management strategies that focus on the traditional areas of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation cycles. Annual scenarios and training exercises could also challenge the interagency process by encompassing different areas of potential disasters, thereby allowing the overall government to further expand their planning and execution skills and to spread their expertise to other potential national disaster activities, such as the mining industry.

## Conclusion

The Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance continues its tradition of training events and exercises that make a positive difference at many levels through the Pacific region. Coupled with a highly supportive United States Embassy and an enthusiastic Alaskan contingent they have built on previous efforts to improve U.S.-Mongolian relationships and expanded these partnerships to build capacity and expertise, thereby assisting the Mongolians to better plan and respond to their natural and manmade disasters throughout the country.

The Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College, is proud to continue its partnership with and support to COE-DMHA. *Exercise Gobi Wolf* adds to a long list of events that have taken place over time that include far ranging topics from Pandemic Influenza (Singapore), to South Asian and later South Eastern Asia Disaster Preparedness (Honolulu).

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